

Torah, Trees, Theologies: Where to Start for Tu B'Shvat



With Tu B'Shvat—the new year for trees—coming up on Sunday, we've got the natural world on our minds. Here's your starter pack on tree appreciation.

Did you know that trees talk? If not, it's time to open your eyes and ears and start listening to them better.

Start with Yankev Fridman's Yiddish tale on Tu B'Shvat, "The Day of Judgment for the Trees," from our friends at *Tablet*.

Now it gets real. Did you know that trees talk? If not, it's time to open your eyes and ears and start listening to them better. Or read about "The Social Life of Trees" at the *New York Times* to know what we're talking about. Then listen to, or read, Suzanne Simard—the ecologist who proved that trees communicate with each other—speak about what this all means at the ever-lovely *On Being* podcast, in "Forests are Wired for Wisdom."

If you are now hooked on the idea of trees talking, go check out the heart-rending novel *The*

Overstory, by Richard Powers. Then it may be time for *The Hidden Life of Trees*, by Peter Wohlleben. At this point, you may find it prudent to run to a forest and commune with some trees for yourself. This is suggested.

Enter more deeply to the tangled world of our oldest teachers, in this issue of *Emergence Magazine* dedicated to trees. I'd suggest starting with a fascinating article on the church forests of Ethiopia. Come for the visuals. Stay for the trees.

If you are still listening, you can check out Yehuda Fogel's tribute to his tree-rebbes, in his "When Great Trees Fall" (yes, that's me!).

Sefaria always comes through when you need them most, so be sure to check out this fascinating source sheet with some sources on trees in the Torah!

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Remember: It is said that there is an ancient Jewish custom to hug a tree on Tu B'Shvat (or there should be). You get extra points if you whisper sweet nothings to the tree in Yiddish as you do. Go get 'em.

Martin Luther King Day

MLK Day is this Monday, so we will be reading about "How the Black Church Fueled a Movement," as we consider the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr.

Although King was a Baptist minister, and Abraham Joshua Heschel a Jewish rabbi, Susanna Heschel, professor and 18Forty guest, writes about "Theological Affinities in the Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel and Martin Luther King Jr."

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What we are listening to (and obsessed with? If by obsessed we mean clicked once, listened thoroughly, and skipped through for the visuals, then yes!): A band named Shlepping Nachas, singing about God in their own lovely idiom.

And if you haven't yet listened or read Marika Feuerstein speak about the fascinating and heartbreaking life of the Feuerstein family, then you really must get on it. You may know about the mensch of Malden Mills, but do you know what happened in the decades to come? This is one of our most powerful conversations yet, so do yourself a favor and blast this in your kitchen all day as you cook. Ignore all suggestions to turn it down. You deserve this.